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ABSTRACT

The adult continuing education (ACE) programs provided under contract with the Gloucestershire (England) Adult Continuing Education Service were evaluated in January-February 1994. An evaluation team visited more than 60 venues, including main sites and a wide range of village halls, family centers, women's institute halls, and other outreach locations. Local education authority (LEA) officers, the nine contract holders that deliver ACE services in the LEA, and various professionals and students were interviewed. Among the evaluation's main findings were the following: ACE service in the LEA is very good, and the standards achieved by students and quality of teaching and learning in the LEA are exceptionally high; appropriate provision is being delivered in a widely accessible range of venues (including the county's most remote rural areas); program participation is good; and although ACE services are delivered by nine contractors, shared values and common understanding generally underpin and permeate ACE provision in the LEA. The following issues were identified as requiring further attention: imbalance between day and evening provision, poor equipment/furnishings of some rural programs, and efforts to meet the needs of specific student groups. (Appended is information about the nine individual contract holders.) (MN)

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ED 379 412

OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION SERVICE

Reference: 71/94/DS

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GLOUCESTERSHIRE ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION SERVICE

31 January – 4 February 1994

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CONTENTS

	Paragraph
INTRODUCTION	1 – 7
MAIN FINDINGS	8 – 17
STANDARDS	18 – 29
QUALITY OF WORK	30 – 36
POLICY, PLANNING AND PROVISION	37 – 42
STUDENTS: PARTICIPATION AND SUPPORT	43 – 48
CURRICULUM RANGE AND DEVELOPMENT	49 – 53
MONITORING AND EVALUATION (QUALITY ASSURANCE)	54 – 58
MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION	59 – 60
RESOURCES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT	61 – 67

ANNEXES A–I – Individual Contract Holders

INTRODUCTION

The Inspection

1. The inspection of the Gloucestershire Adult Continuing Education Service took place in January and February 1994. A team of HMI visited well over 60 venues, including main sites and a wide range of village halls, family centres, Women's Institute halls and other outreach locations. HMI spent more than 120 hours observing 127 classes. Meetings were held with LEA officers, with the nine contract holders who deliver the service, with other full–time and part–time professional, administrative and teaching staff, with guidance workers and with students. Meetings of the Joint Adult Continuing Education Advisory Panel were also attended.

Background

2. Gloucestershire has a population of 528,361 which is increasing by 0.69 per cent per year, well above the national average. The North Cotswolds is a particularly sought after residential area which has enjoyed a 12.6 per cent population increase in the last 10 years. It is however, an ageing population: in 1991 Gloucestershire residents aged 60 plus were 22.5 per cent of the population and 24.5 per cent in the North Cotswolds.

3. Educational achievement in the county is rising. Over two–thirds of 16 year olds continued in full–time education in 1992, and the population of young people gaining four or more A–C GCSEs rose by 11 per cent between 1989 and 1993. Twenty–six point one per cent of 18 year olds in the county gained at least two A levels.

4. One point eight per cent of the population of Gloucestershire is of ethnic minority origin. Of these, 83 per cent is in the Gloucester/ Cheltenham conurbation and the largest single group is of Indian origin (29 per cent), followed by Afro–Caribbean (27 per cent).

5. Between 1981 and 1991, the proportion of women in employment rose from 43 per cent to 48 per cent. Women are expected to account for most of the future labour force growth. An increasing number are in self–employment and many are in part–time jobs. Following national patterns, Gloucestershire has seen a decline in primary and manufacturing jobs and growth in the service sector. The overall county unemployment rate is 6.5 per cent. It is highest in Gloucester (7.2 per cent) and lowest in the North Cotswolds. (5 per cent).

6. The county has strong networks of voluntary, community and arts and crafts organisations such as the Gloucestershire Federation of Women's Institutes, The University of the Third Age, the North Cotswolds Arts Association and the Gloucestershire Guild of Craftsmen.

7. Gloucestershire Adult Continuing Education and Training, (ACET) is a flourishing service. In 1992–93, there were 31,000 course enrolments. This represents 75.3 enrolments per 1000 of the 18+ population, which is well into the upper quantile for shire counties. The LEA spends £2.80 per head of the 18+ population on ACET provision, showing a solid commitment by the county to its adult service. In addition, the service supports well in excess of 800 students on courses funded by other agencies through its Open Door Scheme, the part–time adult student support scheme, and through its adult guidance work, as well as funding research and pump–priming curriculum development through its adult consortia. Since incorporation in April 1993, the Adult Continuing Education Service (ACET), has contracted with nine different providers to run provision across the county. An LEA officer backed by an administrative team at Shire Hall has drawn up contracts which specify what provision is to be made, for whom and at what

price. Recruitment targets are laid down and monitoring requirements specified. Six student groups have been targeted for recruitment: students with special needs, the unemployed, women returners, ethnic minorities, older learners and pre–vocational learners. Five of the contractors are colleges of further education – Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology GLOSCAT, Stroud College, Royal Forest of Dean College, Cirencester College and Hartpury (the specialist agricultural college). The others are Newent Community School, the University of Bristol Department of Continuing Education and two voluntary organisations: the Women's Institute (WI) and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). Provision is delivered at over 200 sites across the county. These range from college main sites through large schools to village or WI halls, libraries, family centres and people's homes. Each of the contractors has a named individual member of staff responsible for co–ordinating the ACET work and for liaising with the local authority. For some staff, ACET is their only or their major responsibility, but for others ACET is part of a wide–ranging brief. Courses are taught overwhelmingly by part–time staff.

MAIN FINDINGS

8. This is a very good service. Standards achieved by students and the quality of teaching and learning are exceptionally high.

9. ACET offers a good spread of appropriate provision in a widely accessible range of venues across the county, including the most remote rural areas.

10. There are good levels of participation by a wide range of people, including increasing numbers from the groups targeted by the service.

11. Although the service is delivered by nine different contractors, shared values, a common understanding and a respect for the traditions of both the county and its adult education service generally underpin and permeate the provision.

12. This picture reflects clear and carefully thought–out policies designed by well–informed elected members together with local authority officers in consultation with an appropriate range of interested parties.

13. Careful and creative thought has gone into devising effective mechanisms for translating policy into practice.

14. There are effective mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the extent to which the service is delivering its policy commitments.

15. The service benefits greatly from its resourceful, experienced and well–qualified tutors who bring to their task both high expectations of students and an impressive insight into their needs.

16. Both LEA staff and providers are still settling into the new relationships post–incorporation. Nonetheless this is a well managed, cost–effective service, giving value for money.

17. **Issues for Attention**

- The imbalance between day and evening provision. In a county with a high and increasing older population, and with the majority of providers running many of their courses in the evening the lack of daytime provision is disadvantageous. There is, however, a lack of

sufficient daytime accommodation, particularly when centres are based in schools or on college main sites, which will need to be addressed.

- Some of the provision in outlying areas, particularly the North Cotswolds, is poorly equipped and furnished. A local resource base in the locality might be considered. In addition, mobile delivery of some provision using a bus or other large vehicle, is a possibility worth considering.

- The service has made a good start but has some way yet to go to fully meeting the needs of the specific student groups it has targeted. Links with Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funded provision need to be strengthened so that the service can offer a wider curriculum across the county and thus attract more students from these groups.

STANDARDS

Outcomes for Students

18. Levels of student achievement are exceptionally high. In 60 per cent of the classes seen, achievement was rated as very good or excellent: in 68 per cent it was good to excellent: in over 94 per cent it ranged between satisfactory and excellent. Students achieve irrespective of age, gender, previous educational experience and socio–economic status, and they do so across the curriculum as a whole. In art and craft classes, practical skills develop alongside aesthetic awareness; in IT and cookery, practical skills and understanding grow jointly; in physical and health classes, students develop their mobility, co–ordination and other physical skills alongside understanding of health issues. 'Intellectual' courses develop understanding of self and the world and the ability to question, discuss, analyse and evaluate.

19. In the best art classes students master a range of skills as a basis for progression. They set their sights high and undertake difficult tasks involving the attainment of new skills. In craft classes too, students set themselves high standards. They master basic techniques thoroughly, with the help of tutors and other more experienced students. They progress to more complex tasks, setting themselves ambitious goals. The culture in classes is such that students do not rest on their laurels but continuously move on, attempting more complex and challenging tasks. Some very high standards were evident from paintings, pottery, jewellery, silverware, upholstered antique furniture, and calf book bindings.

20. The same approach and equal levels of achievement are in evidence where other types of making are involved. In cookery, sewing skills and clothes making, students become proficient in a range of key basic skills before moving on to produce more complex garments, intricate soft furnishings, or more elaborate dishes. Highly skilled teaching, targeted at individual needs, ensures that beginners quickly acquire the skills to produce good results and this leads to good progress and high motivation. For example, in a cake design and decorating class, beginners four weeks into the course were already making sweet peas, carnations and roses to a professional standard. In an Asian sewing class, students made clothes which are not available commercially, creating their own designs and making them up to a high standard. In all these classes, the end products showed evidence of high achievement.

21. In the Guidance Credit provision, a scheme giving intending new adult students free educational guidance, with much of the work targeted at Women Returners, students are enabled to develop their understanding of themselves and their lives. They acquire the capacity to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, and evaluate their own learning as well as the confidence and knowledge to progress to further learning.

22. Students on the best of the more academic courses run mainly but not exclusively by the WEA and the University of Bristol show good levels of knowledge and understanding. In these classes a high level of debate prevails and students are not afraid to challenge theories or develop their own using relevant evidence. Students in a local history research group undertook patient decoding of archive material employing high level skills. Some have had their research published. Students learning about the Stock Exchange demonstrated understanding by the quality of their responses and their depth of questioning. In a class on twentieth century poetry, students with a sound understanding of the text engaged in a perceptive discussion about meaning and the use of imagery, showing ability and willingness to develop their personal responses.

23. These good oral skills are complemented by the high level writing skills demonstrated by students in creative writing classes who produce prose of impressive quality in a wide range of styles.

24. Courses for adults with a range of special needs have been carefully designed. Adults with learning difficulties on practical courses are encouraged to make choices, so that they can decide to make things that are practical and relevant. Independence is developed and students of widely diverse ability work to appropriate individual targets. For instance, students with a range of mental disabilities worked in a cookery class on making a pizza. Five students achieved this task with a minimum amount of help, learning a number of processes along the way. Four autistic students with good support from their care assistants made much less obvious but still discernible progress. Students with learning difficulties in a class on "What's in the News?" put much effort into oral communication and basic writing related to news stories. Oral ability and initiative were evident alongside variable written outcomes.

25. A group of older students based in sheltered housing are acquiring a new lease of life through a communal project to sew a collage wall-hanging of the history of the Forest of Dean. Another 60 strong group of retired students attend 'Young at Heart' sessions where they participate in a range of physical fitness and sports activities and attain high standards.

26. Students consistently strive to achieve better standards. For example, in art and craft classes they want to paint better pictures or produce more complex embroidery. Such progression is not only possible but usual in ACET's classes, given the high quality of both tutors and students. Similarly in the more academic subjects, students want to progress through deepening and extending their knowledge and understanding. Some students have, for instance, followed a series of courses on the history of Gloucester, starting with the Romans, and have now reached the Tudors. Others followed a course on Isambard Kingdom Brunel and have now embarked on one covering the Great Western Railway. In practical subjects such as cookery, some students complete 10-week introductory courses and then return to embark on more ambitious 'Master Chef' programmes. Progression on to FEFC funded courses is much less common, though it does occur. Some students from the six target groups take this route, as do most who participate in the Guidance Credit programme and a selection from other courses.

27. A proportion of students use their learning as a means of earning money. Some take commissions for making clothes or soft furnishings: others ice cakes for special occasions or run small catering businesses. Students produce paintings or make jewellery for sale to tourists, particularly in the Cotswolds. Short stories are sold to magazines. For others, the newly acquired skills save money. Clothes are made for children and furnishings for homes. Furniture is repaired and renovated.

28. Some students are acquiring survival skills – for instance, men suddenly left on their own who may never have cooked before. Others are improving their quality of life through gaining greater fitness or upholstering cherished pieces of furniture as gifts for grandchildren.

29. Practising artists and writers attend some classes for refresher purposes and for the contact. Other students learn for reasons less directly linked to their work but still primarily to enhance their abilities in the workplace.

QUALITY OF WORK

Teaching

30. In two–thirds of the lessons the teaching was good or outstanding. In all kinds of courses, teachers demonstrated a secure command of their subject. Well prepared lessons reflected wide experience, coupled with imaginative practice in supporting learning by adults. Teaching had clear objectives and was characterised by pace and challenge.

31. Although paper record–keeping is minimal, in most cases tutors have made clear initial assessments of students' skills, knowledge and abilities. They also have a good grasp of the progress students have made and the evidence for this is often embodied in work completed, be it prose, paintings, embroidery or Choux pastry. Tutors' firm grasp of individual needs and capacities is demonstrated in their effective teaching of mixed ability groups. For instance, in an art class containing both very new and very experienced students, the tutor began with a demonstration/exposition. This central theme was then interpreted by individual students at their own level, with the tutor feeding in expertise on an individual basis. In a sugar–craft class, the tutor had analysed the skills and potential of all the students. With skilful organisation, she then matched the tasks to their perceived skills and individual talents and monitored their progress. In a well prepared embroidery class, each student had sensitive but challenging individual teaching. Drawing on his detailed knowledge of individual progress and ability, the tutor brought with him special clamps for a 92 year–old student with arthritis, a specific colour chart of wools for a particular piece and some examples of work showing an especially complex form of stitching that one student was attempting.

32. Challenge is implicit in much of the teaching. In a carefully structured art course, the scheme of work was negotiated and shared with students. Key skills were introduced in sequence in a thoughtful and relevant approach which was challenging students. Many craft classes taught by practising crafts people focus on learning through practical exercises. Students decide what they want to make in consultation with the tutor. Skills are taught or reinforced as the particular project in progress demands their deployment. High standards are implicit in the examples of their own work shown by tutors, as well as in the high level skills of tutors who are themselves master crafts people and role models for excellence. The same is true of many other tutors, be they practising writers, proficient cooks or fluent linguists.

33. Such teachers are resourceful and determinated in their work in outreach venues that have few of the usual facilities. An upholstery teacher transports an entire travelling teaching workshop including a home–made blackboard around in the boot of her car to classes in village halls. High level organisational skills and dedication beyond the call of duty underpin the delivery of first–rate teaching under such circumstances. Other teachers, responding to their students, create exciting opportunities over and beyond the main course arrangements. Overseas visits, Saturday schools and residential weekends provide significant additional opportunities in some areas of study such as art and languages.

34. Across the service, teaching demonstrates a strong understanding of how adults learn. The previous experience of students is used and acknowledged in developing learning programmes. Discussion and debate regularly draw upon students' life experiences. A creative writing tutor, herself a successful published author, brings great authority to her role but uses it sensitively. She insists that

comment must be positive and constructive, is concerned that the students find their own 'authentic voice' and only intervenes when they have difficulties. Such approaches contribute significantly to the excellent relationships and mutual respect between teachers and students in most lessons.

Learning

35. The quality of learning is high in the great majority of lessons, rarely becoming less than satisfactory. Students respond with a mix of enjoyment, considerable satisfaction, pleasure and pride in the standards achieved whether this is in debate, skill development or creativity. They show determination to progress and feel confident in bringing forward their own experience, problems and particular needs, assured that teachers will respond with sensitivity. Students cooperate effectively and take in their stride the regular evaluation of progress by teachers, fellow learners and themselves. Hard work, commitment and sustained effort is a regular feature of most learning.

36. Many classes cover a very wide age range of students who mix well and learn from one another. There is often a strong sense of community and mutual support as well as valuable opportunities for students who live on their own to talk together about their learning. Irrespective of whether students are 'first–timers' tackling new skills and shedding anxieties about learning, or experienced, articulate, assertive and independent learners, they support one another in extending their skills and understanding.

POLICY, PLANNING AND PROVISION

37. Following a review informed by high quality consultancy, which took into account detailed local demographic information and student surveys, Gloucestershire County Council adopted its present policy framework for adult education. For many years the Council has convened a central advisory group for adult education. This brings together members, officers, education providers and employment interests and was a forum for discussion of the review recommendations. The policy framework commits providers to work towards the following principles: collaboration, quality, needs, curriculum accessibility, participation, support and equal opportunities. There are six related priority objectives and six identified target student groups.

38. Since April 1993, the LEA has contracted with nine different providers to run adult education in accordance with the agreed principles. Resource allocations are currently historically based but with a steer towards the identified target groups. Another aspect of the effort to broaden the base of participation is a reduction in fees for first–time users. Numbers of such users are impressive in at least one area. Providers are supported and informed locally by adult consortia. These groups bring together interested parties, including students, providers and the voluntary sector to identify needs, comment on current provision and suggest new developments. They ensure that the centrally agreed principles are translated into appropriate local arrangements. Provision is marketed centrally through a free newspaper and various leaflets, as well as locally by providers in a range of ways. In addition, the LEA supports the 'Open Door' scheme which helps adult students to attend mainstream college courses through providing child–care for instance. It also helps a range of students, including those with special needs, through the part–time adult student support fund.

39. These sensible and sensitive arrangements reflect a clear determination to look carefully at the actual needs of the population of Gloucestershire as well as a proper respect for long–established networks involved in adult education. Preserving the best of the old whilst nurturing the new is the intention. It is too early for definitive judgements but there are encouraging signs both that local mechanisms are uncovering unmet needs and that targeting is proving effective. In the North Cotswolds for instance, community link workers and the adult consortium have together set up new provision in

response to local surveys. Classes are thriving in two very small villages, where there was no previous provision. An imaginative 'meet and greet' scheme to equip local people involved in the tourist industry with some basic foreign language competence is underway. Unemployed women are receiving guidance and assertiveness training as a prelude to further education. In the Forest of Dean, there is a successful project for young mothers in Lydney and the local consortium commissioned a survey leading to the publication of a directory of venues suitable for adult education. This work has underpinned the successful delivery of outreach provision for targeted groups and others right across the Forest.

40. Providers are required to produce student and curriculum monitoring data for the LEA, but definitive figures were not yet available at the time of the inspection. Initial targets set by the LEA were founded on approximate data and are to be reviewed in the light of the first year's experience. Provisional figures suggest that targeted groups constitute between a fifth and a sixth of enrolments for most providers.

41. There is no data on progression to FEFC funded courses, though anecdotal evidence exists that some students take this route. However, it is also important to acknowledge that many existing students, particularly older learners, do not seek such progression being entirely satisfied to make progress within the class they are attending.

42. ACET has made some very effective arrangements to ensure access to learning for students but some problems remain. Given that many adult students have unclear or mixed initial motivations for learning, partially self-developmental and partially vocational, it is important that the curriculum available should offer clear opportunities to move forward in either direction once the first step has been taken. Though the LEA's policy takes account of this, arrangements on the ground do not always mirror such agreement. Many evening centres offer only 'non-vocational' provision so that students in a beginners' French class for instance, are unable to progress to a more advanced course such as those certificated by the Institute of Linguists and funded by the FEFC. Further development and expansion of the service, particularly for target groups, may depend in part on arrangements that can guarantee such access.

STUDENTS: PARTICIPATION AND SUPPORT

43. ACET is attempting to increase participation through its policies, course fee levels and remission charges and the identification of target groups. The success of this policy is difficult to judge given the limited life of ACET. However, early indications suggest that the majority of providers are likely to satisfy overall target numbers, but some are experiencing difficulty in providing for particular target groups. On the other hand there is generally good participation by adults with learning difficulties. 'The Great West Railway' course, organised by the WEA, has however, attracted a significant number of first-time students and at Newent the targeting policy is working effectively in attracting older learners and women.

44. The quality of information outlining timetabled provision, student entitlements, including fees and site locations, is generally good. The use of free newspaper inserts is effective. Leaflets explaining facilities for specific groups (eg. Special Needs) are informative. Handouts linked to specific programmes (eg. 'Open Door' and Guidance Credits) are helpful but they are in short supply in some locations. The service is well promoted through events, exhibitions, open days and an increasing number of taster courses.

45. The provision of crêche facilities is variable. In a number of localities (Royal Forest of Dean College and Cirencester), the provision of crêche/playgroup facilities has proved to be a key factor in enabling young mothers to participate.

46. The Guidance Credit Scheme, which is being developed as a collaborative business between the service and the local Training and Enterprise Council, is providing high quality guidance for its target group of students returning to education. For example, groups of women attending family centres in Cirencester and Gloucester have, through a series of group sessions and individual interviews, developed a detailed understanding of the type and range of opportunities available to them both in education and training. They are well informed, and through a process of action planning have identified realistic targets linked to their personal circumstances. In addition, they have developed a sense of personal worth, self–esteem and self–confidence. Retention rates are good. However, guidance available more generally at the time of entry to a course is generally sparse, and although staff/student relationships are good, there are few opportunities for students formally to discuss progress and possible progression routes.

47. Attendance rates during the week of the inspection were good. Although students report a high level of overall satisfaction, they expressed a number of concerns. For example, a group of students in the Forest of Dean area expressed concern about the type and quality of information required at enrolment time; and students in Gloucester expressed a wish to have attendance certificates for their personal satisfaction, and, in some cases, for their employers' requirements.

48. In an attempt to reach students in rural areas, the ACET Service, through its network of providers, offers its provision in a variety of locations including Family Centres, school premises, church halls, WI halls and, in some cases, family homes. There is particularly good use of local community accommodation in the Forest of Dean. Some of these venues are comfortable, with facilities for making refreshments; others are spartan. Nonetheless the policy is successful in placing provision within reach of students.

CURRICULUM RANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

49. The curriculum is varied and comprehensive and offers a diverse range of opportunities for students. The contract drawn up between the LEA and the provider stipulates the type of provision to be delivered. This involves three curriculum areas or bands:

i health, sport, physical fitness;

ii practical, creative craft, skills;

iii languages, intellectual.

In addition, there is provision targeted at six specific groups in the community.

50. The adult consortia can propose curriculum change and innovation. At this stage some groups are more effective than others: nonetheless, all participants have found the network helpful. For example, the Women's Institute and the Royal Forest of Dean College have established contacts with local agencies and have begun to plan a range of programmes. As a result of collaboration between the consortia, a bus equipped as an information and resource centre will travel around the county during Adult Learners Week. Link workers have been established in some areas, eg. the North Cotswolds and the Stroud area to work with the local community, identify needs and respond with appropriate provision. The workers employed by GLOSCAT and Stroud College have identified areas for curriculum development and targeted work includes courses for unemployed adults and women returners. Some, but not all, of the nine adult

co–ordinators who liaise with ACET have an identifiable curriculum role. It would be appropriate for training and support to be offered to the coordinators in relation to this role.

51. Much innovative and challenging curriculum development has emerged in work with the target groups. Provision is relevant to the needs of the community which it serves, for example, Dressmaking for Asian Women, Introduction to Counselling, Preparation for Nursing, Coastal Navigation for Women, Easy Movement for the not so Active, Swimming for the Physically Handicapped and Pre–Retirement and Redundancy courses. Some provision offers opportunities for progression, either within the course where students become skilful and undertake more demanding work or where students move on to gain certification elsewhere. Some opportunities are available for students to move on into college–wide provision.

52. Courses are offered at a variety of venues at different times in the day. The WI and the WEA offer daytime provision, sometimes in members' homes or local centres but many providers rely on school accommodation which is not available in the daytime. This results in a shortage of daytime provision. Saturday workshops, summer courses and taster courses enable students to participate at convenient times and venues.

53. The identification of particular curriculum areas and target groups has enabled the providers to focus on specific provision which is delivered to students at accessible points in the community, with appropriate support and at suitable times. Many providers are aware of the commitment which is needed from the institutions if the provision is to be sustained and developed. It is to their credit that they have moved speedily, are managing sensible programmes and are being responsive at this early stage in the new arrangements.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

54. High priority has been accorded to establishing effective techniques of monitoring and evaluation and to the means by which the LEA can give a firm steer from a distance. Contracts are awarded annually to providers within a clearly defined framework which includes monitoring requirements, quality assurance procedures and an annual evaluative review. Such a framework ensures consistency and compliance across a wide range of providers. The LEA is at its most directive in specifying the information it requires for its own monitoring purposes and the format of the annual review. It leaves more discretion to individual providers in matters of quality assurance, with one important addition of its own, direct observation of work through joint LEA/peer review.

55. In quantitative terms, each provider is set enrolment target figures for each of the three curriculum bands and for each of the service's priority groups. Termly enrolment statistics must be sent annually to the LEA to provide aggregated data on enrolment, course hours and proportions of students on reduced fees. In addition, they are asked to provide data on age, gender and ethnicity. At the end of the period of the contract, it is intended that the LEA will analyse this data as a basis for decisions about future contracts. This should place the LEA in a strong position to comment not only on the effectiveness but also on the equity of provision. However, ease of collection is dependent upon the provider's own management information systems, many of which are still at varying stages of development.

56. Providers are also required to ensure that they adhere to the entirely appropriate eight principles underpinning ACET provision. For the majority of providers this necessitates a translation of these principles into quality standards which mesh with the internal quality assurance system of their own institutions. Although there is some lack of commonality between the various quality assurance systems in place in individual institutions, all providers have been obliged to focus, in relation to their ACET work,

on those aspects of education for adults which the LEA sees as paramount. Smaller providers have welcomed the central steer as an impetus to development. Internal systems comprise user satisfaction surveys, student and tutor evaluation forms and regular course reviews. Several providers are currently involved in an externally–initiated evaluation project on student outcomes. The LEA is also involved in interviewing a sample of students and staff.

57. However, the LEA has wisely recognised the need to go beyond these approaches and to develop ways of evaluating the quality of classroom delivery through direct observation of work. It is in the process of initiating a system of peer review whereby the nine providers, working in groups of three, will inspect a sample of each other's classes using assessment criteria common across the service. This approach was launched by a two–day training conference for providers during which common criteria were agreed. A number of pilot observations have been undertaken. Such an approach represents an excellent first step towards acquiring direct evidence of ACET provision whilst simultaneously contributing to the continuing professional development of staff.

58. The LEA has skilfully set up a model for monitoring quality assurance and review which both draws on the strengths of providers but also ensures that the principles underpinning the service are reflected within all the provision for which it is responsible.

MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION

59. The LEA has no direct managerial role in relation to ACET. It draws up contracts which are then managed by the LEA's post–16 officer who carries a substantial weight of responsibility. Providers in turn manage 'their' area provision. Whether responsible for major provision in a college or running a rural centre on a part–time basis, ACET organisers manage heavy work loads. Both LEA and contract–holding staff manage their responsibilities effectively. The contracts are effective instruments for ensuring delivery of ACET's policies. They specify clearly what is to be delivered and for whom. Targets are laid down and monitoring procedures guarantee accountability.

60. The current arrangements for the management and delivery of ACET have only been in force since April 1993. Some providers who previously received money from the LEA without monitoring or quality control requirements, inevitably see the new demands as excessively bureaucratic. The LEA for its part is not yet entirely conversant with the detail of the context in which each provider is operating. Nonetheless, communication is mostly effective and in essence the contracts work. Common purposes permeate the service and policy has been translated into effective practice. This is a well managed service.

RESOURCES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

61. In 1993–4, the County Council allocated £1.8 million to ACET. 86 per cent is spent on direct provision and support, whilst 5 per cent is devolved to the consortia and colleges for research and development. The remainder covers the central LEA functions which include staff development, marketing, consultancy and Adult Learners Week.

62. ACET has been active in forming partnerships and seeking additional sources of funding. A funding partnership with the Gloucestershire Training and Enterprise Council underpins the Guidance Credits Scheme whilst the European Social Fund has been used in the work with unemployed people in family centres. Other provision is jointly funded with the Economic Development department.

63. Financial resources are efficiently managed and deployed by a well qualified and experienced officer supported by administrative staff. Clear guidance is provided for contractors to help ensure that

funds are appropriately targeted on areas of priority. Sensible steps such as an LEA initiated audit have been taken to control the use of funds and a good range of monitoring and review strategies are in place to assess the service's cost–effectiveness. These factors, combined with the high standards achieved by the numerous students and the quality of provision, clearly indicate that the service is providing good value for money.

64. Accommodation for non–specialist teaching is generally satisfactory and sometimes good. The quality of accommodation in outreach centres is more variable than that on providers' main sites. Specialist teaching requirements are less well served by the current accommodation though some of it is good on the main sites of several providers is good. The lack of specialist accommodation in outreach centres places some constraints on the curriculum which providers can offer.

65. The provision of appropriate resources and equipment to support the teaching is very variable. On the main college sites it is often good but elsewhere it is generally less than satisfactory. Outreach centres seldom have video and OHP facilities, for instance, and sometimes they lack basic black or white boards or mirrors for dressmaking. Specialist equipment for woodwork, painting, IT, music and PE was also less than satisfactory in some classes. The WEA is seriously short of basic equipment such as portable flip charts, slide projectors and videos, although all its provision takes place in outreach centres. Some areas have carried out accommodation audits and produced directories listing outreach accommodation, cost and availability. The ACET service in Gloucestershire would now benefit from the establishment of a county–wide directory as well as from the ear–marking of funds to purchase equipment for use in outreach centres.

66. Tutors are well qualified in, and knowledgeable about, the subjects which they are teaching. The larger contract holders provide induction courses which new tutors are strongly encouraged, or required, to attend. There are opportunities for tutors to take courses of training leading to the Further and Adult Education Teaching Certificate at stage 1 and stage 2. A good proportion of tutors now have these, or other, professional qualifications. There are some good examples of tutors who have progressed from being students on courses, have taken stage 1 training (which is available to prospective tutors), become tutors and then taken stage 2 training. Opportunities have also been provided for tutors to meet with each other to develop their curriculum area and more such opportunities could usefully be provided. Some contract holders effectively monitor and appraise their part–time tutors: by contrast some tutors have little or no contact with more senior staff.

CONCLUSION

67. This is a very good service. It provides value for money, has clear aims and objectives and is well supported by senior officers and elected members. That the service is so good is greatly to the credit of both part–time tutors and the generally well qualified, hardworking, efficient and effective staff.

EDUCATION FOR ADULTS IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

ANNEXES A–I Individual Contract holders

Although the commentary in the Annex that follows repeats some of the main features identified in the report, it is included in this way for the benefit of the individual contractors.

ANNEX A

CAMEO: CIRENCESTER COLLEGE

1. Cirencester College is keen to establish and maintain effective links with the newly formed ACET service in Gloucestershire and is doing so effectively.

2. Standards of achievement are good, particularly in relation to craft work and provision for adults with special educational needs. Students are highly motivated, enthusiastic and are keen to make progress. Attendance rates are good. Some students reported they would value the issue of attendance certificates on completion of their courses. There is scope for further improving information given to part–time adult students about financial entitlements and possible progression routes. Sessions are generally well planned. A well qualified and experienced team of tutors is responsible for teaching the ACET programme. Appropriate staff development opportunities are available. Outreach provision organised by the college in local family centres is good.

3. The ACET programme in the college is well managed and its monitoring and evaluation procedures are effective. A survey on student perceptions has recently been completed. Specific programmes have been evaluated and reported upon. Staff are undergoing training to improve their knowledge and understanding of peer assessment techniques. Management information systems in the college need to be further developed to ensure that ACET requirements are met in terms of data information.

ANNEX B

GLOUCESTERSHIRE COLLEGE OF ARTS & TECHNOLOGY (GLOSCAT)

1. GLOSCAT is a large FE college, with over 2,500 full–time students and over 30,000 part–time students. It has 15,000 enrolments in the School of Adult and General Education. The college provides a wide range of courses over a dauntingly large geographical area including the North Cotswolds. During the inspection over 40 classes were inspected at main and outreach sites. Virtually all the work seen was at least satisfactory, over half was good and some was excellent. The work in the craft area was generally of a particularly high standard and the developmental work in the communities, often as a result of link workers, was good.

2. Students are well supported and are representative of the communities from which they are drawn. However, the management information system which should give an accurate analysis of the student cohort is underdeveloped. Consideration could be given to using the college's expertise on information systems for collecting student data and monitoring and evaluation. Good work was seen in the three curricular bands and in the provision with target groups. However, there is a lack of curriculum leadership in some areas; expertise in other departments could be drawn upon to support the work with adults.

3. The accommodation is satisfactory, although there is concern about some of the less attractive outreach sites and the lack of day–time accommodation. There is a shortage of resources in specific areas – craft, music and IT. Staff are well qualified both in subject matter and in tutor training. Systems for staff appraisal and review are at an early stage. Systems for monitoring and evaluation need to move beyond the course review and student survey stage. Overall, the large and flourishing adult general education programme would benefit from a closer relationship with both the curriculum and the procedures of the college as a whole.

ANNEX C

Gloucestershire Federation of Women's Institutes

The Federation has over 7,000 members and 200 institute bases. These include the W.I. HQ at Gloucester, village and community halls and members' homes. Classes are often offered at the instigation of the members who organise much of their own provision. Recent work with ACET, especially liaison with the adult consortium, has led to some new and challenging developments. The W.I. is considering approaches to establishing a database, to evaluating and monitoring its provision and to continue with targeted provision. Innovative work includes pilot provision in rural villages where assessment of prior learning (APL) and NVQ approaches to learning are being undertaken.

ANNEX D

HARTPURY COLLEGE

1. The college has provided, in 1993/94, a modest range of about 20 generally good quality specialist courses. These have enrolled over 300 students who have been provided with excellent practical opportunities to explore the initial stages of working with plants, animals and equipment associated with 'countryside' activities. They have been able to select from a range of short sequences of day or evening sessions or whole day workshops. These have been well planned and delivered by experienced full–time specialist teachers at the college, enabling students to benefit in full measure from the wide range of up–to–date facilities, including access to independent learning resources through libraries, computers and databases. Students have responded very well to the practical opportunities to have direct contact with living resources in relevant contexts.

2. Most students are people who live and work in rural areas, but the college has not recently conducted a thorough investigation of the range or scale of needs in this sector. Neither has it linked with other agencies who share an interest in rural communities, and this has resulted in the rather modest number of students currently benefitting from access to the skills and resources of the college. To expand provision, as the college wishes, and to monitor the quality of the current courses, the college is taking steps to coordinate administration arrangements, actively assess and identify needs it can meet in partnership with other agencies and introduce specialist adult education tutor sessions into its existing substantial overall staff development programme.

ANNEX E

NEWENT COMMUNITY SCHOOL

1. Standards of work in the Adult Education classes at Newent School are good and students' understanding and skills develop satisfactorily. The quality of outcomes, whether it be in art, pottery, dressmaking, aerobics, yoga or word-processing, is high. Teachers have clear aims and schemes of work are designed to meet the students' needs and expectations. Methods of teaching are appropriate for adult classes and students are given excellent individual support. In the best classes the teachers combined individual tuition with a judicious use of whole class or small group teaching of concepts and skills. Teachers have a very good command of subject knowledge and a high level of expertise. All teachers plan the work to suit the different levels of ability; the best had made notes of students' initial level of achievement and previous experience to inform course planning and evaluation.

2. Relationships between teachers and students and between students are excellent. In an art class the teacher and students continue to meet after the term has ended to take part in summer painting expeditions in the Forest of Dean. Students enjoy their classes and receive much satisfaction from their achievements. In a class where the teaching was not only supportive but also challenging and rigorous the students responded with enthusiasm and reached high standards. In all classes students are gaining confidence as independent learners.

3. However, the policy and planning at Newent School does not fully meet the LEA objectives. Courses on the whole recruit women and older learners. The curriculum is quite narrow as it is restricted by the use of the site in the daytime by the secondary school and the use of the sports centre by the District Council. Thus it is difficult to provide a wide range of classes in the daytime or the teaching of sport in the evening. Nonetheless, the centre is as responsive as it can be to the wishes of the community. It has introduced aerobic classes as a result of requests and trials classes in new subjects.

4. The manager of adult education has drawn up satisfactory procedures for quality assurance and makes good use of available data, including the students' own evaluations. Good leadership is provided, together with sound administration.

ANNEX F

ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN COLLEGE

1. Standards of adult education are good. Courses are well planned and adapted in consultation with the students who enrol so that individuals work on projects that are relevant to them, reflect their abilities, experience and aspirations and provide new learning experiences. Tutors and students work together well. The area is characterised by scattered small towns and villages but by collaborating with numerous local and regional organisations, a programme has been developed which reaches out to cover the area and responds to a wide variety of issues. The curriculum is responsive to need. It is constrained by facilities so that daytime provision is limited, other than for special groups such as those in residential homes or with learning difficulties. Physical recreation and sport are not well provided for.

2. Courses are well managed with careful arrangements for the selection, training and support of tutors, market research projects to identify the needs of unrepresented areas, consultation with students about their perceptions of the courses and a thorough monitoring system. Funding is used flexibly and efficiently which enables a substantial programme to be maintained with modest resources.

ANNEX G

STROUD COLLEGE

1. The college is currently providing 102 adult education courses, on behalf of ACET, in 19 centres across its predominantly rural catchment area. Standards of achievement are generally good, particularly in art and craft, in work with women returners and in courses for adults with special educational needs. Students are committed, enthusiastic and hard–working. Teaching, by qualified and experienced staff, is well structured, underpinned by appropriate schemes of work negotiated with students. Within some of the work there are planned progression routes into mainstream college provision, but more needs to be done to develop closer curricular links between ACET classes and the college units which take nominal responsibility for them. Attention could also usefully be given to identifying and recording progression within courses or within ACET provision, as well as into schedule 2 work.

2. Participation is generally high. There were 2,500 enrolments in 1992/3. A range of daytime courses is available in two larger outreach centres but lack of other suitable accommodation means that some areas are poorly served by daytime provision. There is a need to explore alternative ways of reaching isolated communities since attendance at present is heavily dependent on having independent transport. Although the quality of accommodation and equipment is satisfactory overall, some Outreach centres, such as village halls, place limitations on what can be offered.

3. Management of the provision by the college is effective, with efficient administrative support and regular staff development opportunities offered to the largely part–time staff. Central documentation and record–keeping are good and the college provides the LEA with the data it demands for monitoring purposes on a termly basis.

4. The college is working hard to maintain the cohesion of the programmes for adult learners which it has developed over some years. It values the relationships with the LEA and views ACET work as a vital initial link with potential students, enabling it to maximise access for the whole community, particularly the most disadvantaged.

ANNEX H

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL CONTINUING EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

1. The quality of the work seen was all very good. Students are generally well educated, are intellectually challenged and the learning process is well managed to promote their independence and to capitalise on their considerable previous experience.

2. The programme is a small part of the overall provision of the Department which is currently under review. The service complements that provided by other contractors by meeting the needs of a particular sector of the population.

ANNEX I

THE WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION

1. The WEA provision has many strengths. Classes are well organised, with clear aims and appropriately challenging material. Tutors are well qualified, experienced and authoritative in their command of teaching material. As a result, the students respond well. They are highly motivated and often have good prior learning skills. Standards of achievement are good overall and are sometimes excellent. Students draw on their own experiences and knowledge gained from private reading to extend discussion, develop their own ideas, pose challenging questions to tutors and, in writing workshops, produce some high quality writing.

2. Courses currently offered are concentrated in the Liberal Arts area and people over 60 years old form the major client group. Priorities in extending and developing this provision have been identified in the WEA's district strategic plan for 1993/4 and these are being pursued with varying levels of success.

3. Quality assurance procedures are a developing feature, but there needs to be more formal documentation supporting course planning and the development of more effective ways of assessing students' achievements. Teaching accommodation is generally satisfactory in terms of access and comfort, but often lacks basic teaching aids such as blackboards. The WEA's lack of appropriate portable equipment exacerbates the situation, which is only partly alleviated by tutors providing their own equipment. The lack of appropriate equipment and accommodation at an affordable cost severely limits the number of practically-based courses which can be offered. Staff development is not a strong feature, but a welcome initiative this year has been the creation of tutor-mentors, who provide informed support for tutors.